

Uribe's other war: the students and public universities

Introduction

For years, the dirty war raging in Colombia has moved to the university campuses, where students, workers and professors have suffered threats, persecution and murder. This, in the middle of a well orchestrated media campaign to create an atmosphere of hysteria, which reached its climax with the famous videos shown by Gina Parody, an Uribe supporter and senator, and the accusations from the director of the Department of Administrative Security (DAS) [1], with which they accused the organised student movement to be a mere façade of the insurgency. It is not necessary to insist that this atmosphere of collective hysteria is what the state was looking for in order to justify the use of brutal force, that under president Uribe Vélez's so-called policy of Democratic Security means nothing but the militarisation of all spheres of social life.

Contrary to the image portrayed by the official media of the whole situation, as if all of these acts of violence against the public universities were just isolated cases, unconnected with each other, and alien to political motivations, a systematic study of these aggressions reveal a **global strategy of repression, control and intervention of public universities**. This strategy consists of different aspects in which, as it has been the typical response of the dominant classes to social protest, the repressive action of the official institutions and unofficial institutions (ie. Paramilitary gangs) are combined.

By means of this strategy it is intended to impose an elitist model of education, to deepen the commoditisation of public universities and of the very concept of education (turning education into a substantial business instead of a right) and also to eradicate actual or potential centres of criticism to the authoritarian regime being imposed with Uribe's political project. The repression and criminalisation of the student movement, of the critical academics and of the unionised university workers pursue, as well, to squash the resistance to this project impelled by the government of Uribe Vélez.

This document of a collective nature is both a denunciation and a reflection that aims at strengthening the resistance they try to suppress by revealing the mechanisms which are used to advance the institutional and paramilitary intervention of the public universities, and thus to help to advance towards the defeat of this authoritarian project being imposed in Colombia.

1. The Pedagogical Neoliberalism

For many years now, Colombian higher education, especially public education has suffered substantial changes related to what is globally know as "pedagogical neo-liberalism" [2]. This kind of neo-liberalism has its origin in the "Atcon Plan" of 1963 and the proposals driven by Milton Friedman in 1980 [3]. The "pedagogical neo-liberalism" is part of the capitalist global trend of privatisation and subsequent commoditisation of culture, health, housing and public services. Higher education institutions, as centres for the development

of power and knowledge, are fundamental tools for the consolidation of the status quo. The university is to be included in the larger project of neo-liberal reforms and, therefore, it becomes necessary to adjust it to the principles and contents of education as settled by the free market rules.

As mentioned above, since 1963, the Colombian higher education has essentially followed the guidelines of the Atcon Plan. This plan is a synthesis report on the Latin American universities that Rudolph Atcon, an adviser to the US State Department, made in the context of the "California.Mission" Atcon suggests in his report that the Latin American universities must be reformed not only to insert them into the landscape of the neo-liberal global economy, but also so they are not contrary to U.S. interests. In his words: "Latin America , living in a state of permanent anachronism, makes it necessary to penetrate its society with a social elite who sympathize with the US system and model" [4]. To ensure the creation of this social elite, it is essential that access to universities is restricted and that, in general, there is a significant harmony of them with the US lifestyle. This clearly ensures the continuity of colonial rule and the adoption of policies related to global capitalism. But, as if that were not enough, Atcon insists that the development of this educational model must be accompanied by the elimination of negative forces that abound in the higher education institutions. The U.S. refers to two main forces. The first is that of state funding, which under neo-liberal premises, is a hindrance to the development of the free market. The second, is the existence of a radicalised and politicised student base that can become an obstacle for the implementation of reforms required by the new educational model.

As is well known, the Atcon Plan in its infancy years received the name of "pedagogical neo-liberalism". Milton Friedman, in his book "Freedom to Choose" states that students and their parents should have the freedom to decide exactly in which institution they prefer to study and, therefore, in order to be more consistent with liberal democracy and free market, the State should fund the demand and not the supply of education. Friedman's proposal is that the students then becomes customers who chooses freely and, if they do not have money for the institution of their choice, they should appeal to scholarships, educational loans, or various financing alternatives. Thus, attention shifts from the field of providing a public service to that of customers, and it is they as such that become the focus of educational development. This goes hand in hand with the formation of customers that are optimal for the functioning of the market. Customers will not only contribute to the greater or lesser demand for certain educational institutions, but also themselves, after being educated, will become human capital offered in the market exchange. Each student, upon entering an institution, is investing in himself/herself to qualify his/her workforce and make himself/herself attractive and competitive in the market. This work force acquires a value, and the graduate student, who's now a professional, is nothing but a commodity that can be exchanged as any other. It is this form that the "commoditisation of education" begins together with the mass production of professionals with certain job skills and a range of techniques for efficient production processes.

The pedagogical neo-liberal proposal of Acton and Friedman has recently been updated in the Bologna Plan. This plan seeks the establishment of a Common European Education Area by 2010. Its main goal is to unify the educational programs to facilitate the exchange of students and alumni. Although the principle draft of Bologna seems to be another of the

virtues of global capitalism, the reality is that behind its purpose is a policy of privatisation, standardisation of education, declining quality of undergraduate programs and of violation to university autonomy.

2. The Public University and the imposition of Pedagogical Neo-liberalism

In Colombia, the teachings of neo-liberalism have been imposed - even, as shown below, with blood and fire- with the guidelines of international agencies such as the World Bank, ECLAC and UNESCO. The Colombian government, particularly the current one, has tried to fulfil the goal of applying the measures of these agencies, and in order to carry out that objective, it has put the public universities on the spotlight. This is no accident since the public university is deficient in terms of neo-liberalism, and has so far been one of the most important bastions of resistance to this model.

However, the imposition of pedagogical neo-liberalism within the Colombian public higher education system has its times and strategies. First, it is not done immediately, but has a slow pace that often contributes to obscuring the substantial targets. Secondly, the imposition is made from different angles, sometimes pointing to economic, social and political, and in others, policing and academic issues [5]. With this in mind, the most direct way of including the public universities within the educational system that the market demands is certainly privatisation. This privatisation is a slow process that consists of public universities being steered to a dangerous state of under funding. This has been developed with the Law 30, that came into effect in 1992, which while continued with the transfer from the nation to public universities, it largely neglected the needs of these institutions and froze the increase in resources for the renovation of the academic staff, of educational facilities, coverage for new infrastructure, the provision of libraries and laboratories and the investment projects of the universities. From then until today, the Colombian public universities have experienced different measures of under funding that have deepened considerably with the National Development Plan (NDP) of the Uribe administration and the inclusion, during his government, of the higher education institutions in the so called bankruptcy law. The first NDP of Uribe was to subtract 12% from the budget of all public universities in the country, the second, through the famous Article 38, found that public universities must compete with the national government for the payment of pension liabilities [6]. For its part, the bankruptcy law made it possible for the rule of corporate restructuring to be applied to all public universities, which in short means that such institutions slowly become businesses and are subject to agreements promoted by the Ministry of Finance.

These measures left us facing a worrying scenario of budget embezzlement within several public universities in the country. The most famous case is the University of the Atlantic which showed, among other things, an increase of 330% in enrollment, the dismissal of several workers and the reduction of teachers and part time teachers [7]. But apart from Atlantic University, we can mention the large budget deficits that are facing the University of Pamplona, the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia-UPTC, the University of Magdalena and the National Pedagogical University [8]. According to the same data from the Ministry of Education public expenditure on higher education was reduced from 1% of GDP in 2002 to 0.92% in 2009.

However, besides this crucial economic component, which gradually leads public universities to privatisation, we find the attack that is carried out upon the academic field, political and social grounds. The decline in educational quality and homogenisation according to U.S. and European models are introduced by academic reforms -such as that attempted Marco Palacios in 2005 at the National University- and the changes of student statutes. On the political side it is clear that higher education institutions in the country have forever lost their autonomy and, on the other hand, that decisions made within them are in most cases undemocratic. Thus, reforms, be they academic or economic, are implanted in the most authoritative manner possible, imposing measures with little or no consultation or discussion. In social terms, the university is becoming less concerned with the students' welfare and with the access of low income students. Cafeterias and recreation centres are moving into private hands and student residences are almost nonexistent in most of the campuses around Colombia .

Similarly, the social dimension of public universities is also under fire from the education policies of Uribe. Although the Latin American university was born under the specific model of the Napoleonic French court, which was intended to prepare the children of landowners, merchants and officials to perform in positions of government and other prestigious liberal professions [9], after the Cordoba Manifesto of 1918, the university experienced a slow process of democratisation and openness that began to settle in Latin America several decades later. This manifesto, which basically posited university autonomy, student co-government, academic freedom, free education paid for by the State and the general democratisation of the university, was adopted almost verbatim by the nascent student movement in Colombia [10]. Thus, the Manifesto of Cordoba made visible at higher education institutions around the continent a class conflict which was latent, and it will leave a deep mark afterwards in what is understood as a Latin American public university. Universities, deeply elitist and therefore designed to train the technical and intellectual cadres of the bourgeoisie, undergo internally a series of changes as a result of social and political fights led by the students. But it is precisely these partial victories of the rebellious students that are being attacked by the imposition of the pedagogical neo-liberalism.

3. The student movement and the resistance to the educational model

However, this wave of attacks against public universities has not gone unanswered. Since 2005 the country has been shocked several times by major demonstrations and protests inside and outside the universities. Facing the academic reforms of Palacios, the National University students reacted with the biggest strike in the history of the university since 1984. The strike lasted several months and was resumed even after the students returned from forced holidays. Faced with such a strike the rector had to resign and be replaced by Palacios Ramón Fayad, who eventually faced a partial victory for the student movement. Two years later, in 2007, another strike erupted, this time at national level, because of Article 38 of the NDP. The strike lasted several months in various universities of the country and was accompanied by large and numerous street demonstrations and even by violent protests in cities like Manizales and Popayán. In Bogotá, all public universities, not just the National University , joined the strike and were supported by several students from

district schools. This time the country's universities were closed down, and some semesters were cancelled and many students were also arrested. In 2008 the National University, and especially its headquarters in Manizales, Medellín, Bogotá and Palmira, experienced a large student protest because of the authoritarian introduction of a new Student statute. Although there were many street demonstrations, universities were blocked for several days and occupied by students. Principals tried to close the campuses, but they were open every passing day by people who joined the protest. Besides these three major events, other universities such as the Pedagogical Universities of Bogotá, of Valle del Cauca (Univalle), of Atlantic, of Antioquia, Tolima and that of Tunja, to name only a few, have protested constantly about budgetary problems, the academic reforms and the repression against the student movement.

4. The totalitarian control of the centres of critical thinking

But it would be an error to think that an intrinsically authoritarian project like the one of Uribe, that has been characterized by the control of the media and that rests on the forceful establishment of a counter-insurgent hegemonic thought (that pretends to see in the guerrillas the cause and the last reason of all the evils who afflict to this world), by the historical revisionism of Colombia and the installation of a collective amnesia, would have the interest to attack only the interests of the students only in terms of their actual vindications. All authoritarian regimes concentrate their attacks on the universities, insofar as they see in them an enclave of potential questioning of the system. Another leader of a totalitarian regime, the dictator Pinochet, coined a famous phrase that perfectly describes the Uribe vision for higher education: "they who come to the universities come to study, not to think".

But we need to understand this in its context. One characteristic strategy of the mindset of the totalitarian Uribe regime is its concern to safeguard and enhance the domination dynamics which ensure the perpetuity of the *status quo*. This means that in recent years the government has used a plethora of media, economic, political and repressive devices to retain power, building a project that celebrates the right of military logic, which, under the counter-insurgency alibi, has received the support of the most conservative and backward elites of the country, especially, of the paramilitary groups.

This counter-insurgent strategy has its greatest expression in the "Policy of Defence and Democratic Security" [11] written in 2003 which, in the words of President Uribe, seeks to "restore order and security" which has been usurped by "terrorism." Throughout this document there is an explicit interest in clarifying that "democratic security differs from the conceptions of security professed by authoritarian regimes, proponents of ideological hegemony and political exclusion" and made clear that achieving the country's security is not incompatible with democratic processes, and much less with the protection of human rights. However, he clarified that "we must draw a sharp line between the right to dissent and criminal conduct," which does not discard the possibility of linking (conveniently) any action or thought of dissent with the current regime with terrorism, against which "there can be only one answer: to defeat it."

It is important to note that this counter-insurgency policy entails not only a logic of war and annihilation of those social sectors who openly express an interest to turn this scene of social and economic inequality, but also seeks to intervene against the **potential dissidents** that is, anywhere and anyone that the doctrine of the regime has not achieved to control absolutely, where dissent has not been completely overshadowed and where -in the eyes of totalitarian regime- organisational proposals may emerge which call into question the prevailing order, and, ultimately, the interests of the dominant class in the country.

One of the sectors that enter within this category of dissident potentialities is the university sector conformed by students, professors and workers. That is to say, within the academic scope interstices exist that have not yet conquered absolutely by the doctrine of the government, which become scenes of conflict and persecution, where the thin line which differentiates the right to dissent (to think, to discuss, to question, to investigate, to criticize) vanishes quickly to open a passage to the criminalization of the university sector.

5. McCarthyism and criminalisation: preamble to violence

In this way, during the government of President Uribe the widespread allegations and accusations made by senior officials to stigmatize the universities and other centres of public education (the National Training Service - SENA, for example) as urban dens to train subversives, has been a constant. One of the first persons to make such high-sounding declarations was the vice president Francisco Santos, who on October 20, 2006 issued statements in the media asking almost verbatim, the militarization of public universities, under the assumptions that there operate subversive groups and student activists are "infiltrated terrorists" [12].

Following this line of arguments, on April 13, 2007, the then Agriculture Minister Andrés Felipe Arias (now presidential candidate for the Conservative Party), who also is considered "a loyal soldier in the paths of Uribe" [13], asserted that it was necessary to infiltrate the mainstream "dens of terrorists," ie the universities [14]. Two years later, Senator Gina Parody of the U Party [15] had played along with a whole mainstream media orchestra that resonated strongly, a propitious scene for the stigmatisation of the university movement when affirming that "the FARC is infiltrating the universities of Bogotá", stating that in these institutions "they are attempting to indoctrinate nuclei with clear military objectives" [16].

Also during September 2008, while Parody unleashed hysteria with the alleged "terrorist infiltration" of public universities in Bogotá, the director of the DAS, Maria del Pilar Hurtado added to this well-orchestrated macabre comedy and accused student organisations of serving as fronts of the FARC-EP [17] and that at the University of Antioquia, students of bacteriology, physics, physical education, zootechnics and student groups such as that of social medicine would be a "seed" of FARC-EP [18]. As a result of these charges, by the way, at least 20 students had to move because of the escalation of threats.

Such statements are aimed at reducing all forms of student organisation, any protest, demonstration or expression of dissent to mere activities promoted by the insurgency, in order to pursue their criminalisation. That is, seeking to deprive any student movement of

political meaning and sense, labelling them as the handiwork (or at least accomplices) of "terrorist" groups, thus seeking a McCarthyist effect to justify and facilitate the subsequent repressive action on them [19].

That these stigmatisation is the preamble to violence, can be deduced from the statements of paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso in connection with the intervention that the right-wing death squad known as United Self-Defences of Colombia (AUC) carried on the University of Cordoba (UNICOR), because this was supposedly a space "where a tendentious ideology was thought in favour of the guerrilla phenomenon (...) We could not permit the indoctrination of young men (...), so we started to act" [20].

6. Repressive violence preamble to the intervention

Criminalisation does not go unnoticed by the State. In fact, it is their own institutions, in the hands of officials of doubtful reputation with clear links to paramilitary groups, that systematised and institutionalised the persecution of students, workers, trade unionists and university professors. This was the case, for instance, in late 2008 when the then Prosecutor of the 12 National Anti-Terrorism Unit, Jorge Ivan Piedrahita Montoya ordered an investigation of the databases of the national universities, in order to investigate possible links to illegal armed groups with these schools [21]. According to the deputy minister of higher education, the databases requested contained the information of at least 1,450,000 people [22]. The measure, which was established on October 22, 2008, led in November 12th to the opening of criminal investigations and judicial proceedings against members of the universities [23]. One these was William Javier Díaz Ramírez, a professor at the District University (Universidad Distrital) and coordinator of the Roots Student Training Workshop - TJER, who was arrested on November 14, 2008. The prosecutor was finally dismissed by the Disciplinary Chamber of the Supreme Judicial Council and disqualified for 20 years for holding public office, in a process that found him guilty of abuse of authority and other irregularities [24] committed during the exercise of his office [25].

This flood of accusations prompted a wave of arrests, thereby strengthening the institutional and political persecution against the public university and dissident positions that did not follow the rules defined by the regime. This is demonstrated by the arrest of several teachers and students in public universities accused of "rebellion," such as: Maria Antonia Lopez Espitia and Ipayú Reyes (both students of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia), Isabel Cristina Guzmán (actress and student of the National University), Hugo Giovanni Hilarion (member of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Colombia - FESCOL), Edison Javier Reyes Roa (member of Territorio Sur) [26] and other teachers and researchers even abroad are still subject to persecution: for example, the case of arbitrary arrest and deportation to Colombia on May 22 2009 of Miguel Angel Beltran, a renowned Colombian academic, who was doing postdoctoral studies at the Centre of Latin American studies in UNAM (Mexico) who was accused of "being a prominent member of the FARC" [27].

In this regard, and in the context of student strikes and protests in 2008 at the National University of Colombia, President Uribe himself said that it was the very students and teachers from public universities who are asking that the Judicial Police and the General

Attorney bring to justice “members of subversive groups that are doing harm to the faculties of education”. The president explained that the Colombian government respects academic freedom, but "can not tolerate criminals entering the universities." It is therefore necessary that the police “bring to justice as soon as possible those criminals who are doing harm to the National University " [28].

7. Paramilitary intervention of universities

The high-intensity warfare in several of the country's public universities is not limited to institutional persecution and legal repression, or media accusations and inflammatory speeches. Since the supposed demobilisation of the right wing paramilitaries in 2006, that formally brought the AUC to an end, there is still a continuation of paramilitary structures under new organisational forms but without a unified command at a national level (which takes us back to some extent to a similar situation to Paramilitarism before 1997, mostly as regional groups). But also, on the other hand, they are now being called “emergent bands”, as if they did not have anything to do with the strategy of domination by the ruling class and therefore are reported as mere expressions of common crime. It is difficult to think that these complex processes are tried to be reduced to simple and isolated criminal acts, particularly in the face of clear evidence that the aggressions towards the universities are being carried out in coordinated and methodical form.

With the Law of Justice and Peace in place, the paramilitaries, “reintegrated” into civilian life, and after their “normalisation” by means of the existence of qualification programs and education [29], they have been able to enter the university campuses and to arm squads within them with an eye to intervene a space of critical thought in a country where such spaces are becoming smaller through censorship, terror and cooptation of the media.

While it is clear that we are in a situation in which paramilitaries have intensified this campaign to universities nationwide, which has been facilitated by the political scenario posed by the Law of Justice and Peace, it is important to note the paramilitary infiltration and intervention is not a new phenomenon. This is a process that must be taken into account if we are to understand extreme cases such as the University of Cordoba, where it can be seen very clearly the constituent elements of the process of paramilitary intervention of universities.

8. The intervention of the AUC at the University of Cordoba (UNICOR): a Paramilitary model

UNICOR is a case in which, thanks to the testimony of paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso, there is abundant evidence of how the modus operandi of the paramilitaries is being used against public universities. The truth, by the way, is only recently coming to light in an environment in which terror still reigns, where the paramilitary presence is strong and where the media still "justifies" the people associated with the paramilitaries because of their supposed "popularity", achieved through terror and because of the real or imagined actions of the insurgency. As one columnist says in the magazine *Semana*, "it is unacceptable to continue justifying the slaughter within this university with the false statement that it is a ‘nest of guerrillas’" [30].

In 1995 the assault began with a wave of paramilitary violence against the university community on par with the stigmatisation of UNICOR as a "nest of guerrillas": that year student Francisco Aguilar Madera was murdered and a year later, professor Alberto Alzate Patiño was also murdered. In June 1996 an attempt was made on the life of the college union leader René Cabrales, and instead of killing the leader, the paramilitaries killed her granddaughter of just 2 years of age. This occurred in a context of widespread violence and killings in Montería (Capital of the Cordoba department) and the whole department, towards teachers.

Then, in 1999 began the direct paramilitary intervention, which occurred in stages:

- First, **infiltration** through the establishment of one of their contacts in the Student Council for tasks of intelligence and the creation of the "**university self defence**".

- By means of threats (including the kidnapping of rector Eduardo Gonzalez and some students, and the subsequent murder of one of the candidates to become rector, Hugo Iguarán) **they managed to install as rector in September 2000, one of their own**, Victor Hugo Hernandez [31]. When he fell from grace with the leaders of the AUC, he was simply replaced in 2002 by Claudio Sánchez Parra, who was to be the rector up to December 2008, when he was captured by police [32], moment in which President Uribe publicly defended him, following his tradition of defending everything related to paramilitarism [33].

- Then, between 2000 and 2002, comes the stage of the **targeted killing of teachers** Freddy Fuentes, Manuel Segundo Ruiz (both leaders of the teachers union), Rene Rios, James Antonio Pérez, Félix Antonio Avilez (demobilized ex-member of the People's Liberation Army - EPL), Ivan Antonio Garnica and students such as Francisco José Ayazo, Marlin de la Ossa, Pedro Esteban Manotas, Eduardo Enrique Hernandez and Sheila Olascoaga.

- In February 2003, the rector **organised a meeting between leading academics and Mancuso** during which he threatened them, saying he will not allow subversive presence at the university, which was the completion of the circle of paramilitary involvement in UNICOR.

It is important to note that in all these actions the paramilitaries counted with the complicity of the Technical Investigation Unit of the Attorney General - CTI (whose director Rosalba Negrete was a person they trusted) and of the Armed Forces: of the Local Criminal Investigation Unit -SIJIN (Agent Wilfredo Ortiz himself was the bodyguard of Mancuso), of the Police (the commander Raúl Suárez was a regular supporter the AUC) and the Captain of the Marines Jorge Muñoz. Also they enjoyed the support of civil authorities and of the Governor María Jesús López [34].

Having said this, President Uribe has maintained intimate ties with the elite of the area, ie, farmers, military, paramilitary leaders, landowners [35] and the influential political sectors that, in a strong alliance, have consolidated in these lands a reckless counterinsurgency project through the completion of bloody massacres, of which the paramilitary involvement in the UNICOR is but just one aspect. So no wonder that this region, that remains a clear paramilitary dominion, which during the last decade saw the foundation of the Self Defence

of the Farmers of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCUR, predecessors of the AUC) by the hand of the Castaño brothers, and that saw the birth of one of the bloodiest figures of the zone, Salvatore Mancuso [36] -who does not deny his admiration for the current president [37]-, is a region described by Uribe as "one of the few corners of the country where there is peace" [38].

9. Universities in the sights of Colombian paramilitaries

For some time we can say that the wave of violence against the universities has become a rule; that in more than one college campus groups have been linked to the "demobilized" paramilitaries; and that, in some cases, academic authorities are in full collusion with these organisations.

Here are some of the highlights of violence affecting the university community and some elements at our disposal allow us to infer, based on the model of UNICOR, that there is a strategy for paramilitary intervention of public universities being implemented right now throughout Colombia :

A. Infiltration and academic links with the paramilitaries

Universidad Industrial de Santander (UIS), "The Pistol Plan"

The case of the UIS is a clear case of how the paramilitary groups operate with the connivance and support of some academic authorities. Jaime Alberto Camacho, rector of the UIS, held in July 2007 conversations with a paramilitary leader, known as "Felix", concerning the physical elimination of leftist students and leaders of the student movement who oppose the neo-liberal reforms that he was pushing forward. Some of these phone conversations were recorded and were made public on May 4 this year [39]. The rector mentions a list of students to be "wiped out" and this plan is called "Pistol Plan," in the purest style of the Mafia [40].

Since that time, the death threats to students, academics and members of the UIS began. These were issued by a paramilitary structure known as the "Águilas Negras" (Black Eagles) [41]. There was also a constant harassment by the academic authorities to take disciplinary measures for students involved in protests [42]. Even the Department of Communications in the UIS was instructed to record and to carry out espionage against trade unionists and students [43].

Recently, on February 13, 2009, a threat from the paramilitary organisation "Bloque Metropolitano de Bucaramanga 'Nueva Generación – Águilas Negras'" circulated among the university community, in which more than 40 students, academics and workers were threatened. The communiqué which was threatening individuals and student groups stated clearly: *"We are a group of students of the UIS who demobilised from the AUC and who identify ourselves with the policies of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez and will stay with him until the final victory over the guerrillas hidden and disguised as student representatives – trade unionists of Sintraunicol, as human rights defenders in the UIS, and so on. This is a*

step forward to fulfil the desire of our president to consolidate the communitarian state and democratic security"[44].

It should be noted that these disclosures are made in a context of increasing attacks, threats and harassment against the university by the paramilitary and public forces [45], some of which have entered the university after their alleged "demobilisation" through the Justice and Peace Law, according to the pamphlet quoted threat.

B. Birth of Paramilitary groups and threats

One of the most pressing concerns about Uribe's government reckless lash against the university community, is that it coincides with the emergence of paramilitary groups in the urban centres that support this policy of intimidation of activists from left, thus conforming a very favourable scenario for the presidential aspirations of silencing the voice of universities.

The picture inside the public universities is so critical that by the year 2006 the Ombudsman, through its Early Warning System (SAT) issued a report on the public universities in Bogotá, in which stressed that these universities were at a high level of risk by the actions of "illegal" groups and by the criminalisation of which they have become victims, especially over the last five years by members of the national government, orchestrated with the especial assistance of the media [46].

For example, on Wednesday, November 12th, 2008 (the same day that court proceedings were begun against the universities by order of the prosecutor Jorge Iván Piedrahita Montoya) e-mails arrived in the accounts of the Department of Law, Political and Social Sciences of the National University of Bogotá, containing a threatening note with the subject "Final Warning". This indicated as a military objective of the paramilitary organisation "Águilas Negras" thirty-three (33) persons; among them are twelve (12) students, four (4) graduates of the university and two (2) teachers of the Faculty of Law and Political Science. But apart from declaring these people as military targets, there was also a "curfew" set by this organisation on the campus: "*We decreed a curfew in the National University from November 18, not for students but for the rebels, and that they should not stay in the university premises between 6:00 pm and 6:00 a.m. and to this effect we have paramilitary staff in this area*" [47]. Also, the note states that these groups have decided to declare the university campus as a battleground and that they will not make public anymore their blacklists, because they create "*useful idiots for subversion*" (ie. Human rights defenders), but that they will begin to act directly instead without further warnings [48]. It is worth clarifying that this was the fifth threat received at the National University following the accusations made by government officials such as Senator Gina Parody about students thus resulting in many being forced to leave the country.

However this problem is not only circumscribed to the city of Bogotá , or to the National University ; on the contrary, the threats of paramilitary assault against public universities appear to be systematically occurring across the country. For example, 2 recent cases illustrate this. On Friday March 6th, 2009 intimidating e-mails from the "Bloque Antioqueño of the AUC" arrived to 30 student leaders from the University of Antioquia

(Medellín), which warned in the following terms: "*you have a week to disappear or we will make you disappear*" [49]. But that's not all, in March 2009 over 100 students were threatened and three were wounded. Furthermore, between March and April this year police raided the Universities of Antioquia and Valle, and many students and professors of the University of Caldas , Cauca , La Guajira were threatened [50].

C. From threat to murder

These intimidating communications were sent out at the same time while students were killed throughout the country. An overview of the violence against the Colombian student movement between 2002 and 2006 shows us 120 threats, 5 raids, 174 personal injuries, 28 harassments, 11 court charges, 204 arbitrary arrests, 15 displacements, 11 abductions, 10 tortures and 14 murders recorded, for a total of 592 cases [51].

It is worth bearing in mind that, in addition to the accusations by senior government officials and threats from paramilitary groups, a main stage where this violence is emerging is in the control of student protest. This, today, is in the hands of the ESMAD (Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squad), whom the latest Report of the District Human Rights Committee attributed the deaths of six students in two years. It is also important to remember that ESMAD were harshly criticized in the Annual Report of the Colombian UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who drew the students as victims of fractures as a result of the impact of gas grenades and pointed at them for being implicated in the death of Johnny Silva during the student protests against the FTA in the Universidad del Valle in 2005 [52].

For we can not allow our fallen comrades to be forgotten, and to demonstrate that this is not about a few isolated cases, we believe it relevant to publicise a list of some of the cases of which we know, which we are almost certain to be an incomplete list in any case:

Univalle

- On the 22nd of September, 2005, the ESMAD shot at close range and killed a 21 year old chemistry student, Johnny Silva, inside the university campus during a national day of protests against Colombia 's FTA with the U.S [53]. This case has been emblematic for even though the responsibility of the ESMAD has been proven, no individual has been found responsible. What's more, a Public Prosecutor delegated before the Supreme Court of Cali (Carlos Adolfo Millán) has been appointed to try to clean the blood from the hands of the ESMAD on this crime and to guarantee at all costs that this crime, like all committed by the state, go unpunished. This has motivated the murdered student's family to take the case to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) [54]

- On April 10th, 2006 hired hit men murdered in Yumbo a student of social sciences, William Ortiz [55].

- On October 4th, 2006, hired hit men killed a student of pre-hospital care Julián Andrés Hurtado, who was 30 years old. It is important to stress that Julián Andrés led a commission investigating the murder of Johnny Silva which proved ESMAD was guilty and he was also an active student leader [56].

- On August 3rd, 2007, students Katerine Soto Ospina y Rolando Quinteros were attacked by the army in the village of San Cipriano , a tourist town of Buenaventura . As a consequence of the attack, Katerine died. The army simply washed their hands saying that it was a mistake [57].

- On March 26, 2009 Business Administration student Juan David Jiménez Caballos was murdered by hired hit men on the outskirts of the Zarzal branch of Univalle [58].

University of La Guajira

- On March 9th, 2009 Ethno-education student Eder Enrique Sierra, 38, a member of the Colombian Association of University Students (ACEU), was murdered by hired assassins while en route to study [59].

Universidad de Antioquia

- In March 2009 Jorge Andrés Isaza Velásquez, 28, former law student was murdered in the campus [60].

Universidad del Cauca (Unicauca)

Milton Troyano, a student of biology and prominent student leader, was murdered on the night of October 18th, 2006 by hired assassins who followed him out of the university [61].

Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas

Oscar Salas (20 years of age, studying Humanities and Languages) was killed on March 8th, 2006 by ESMAD during a student protest [62]. He had recently won a prize in poetry in college and his murder by shooting, prevented him from receiving it [63].

Universidad del Atlántico

- An explosion on October 24th, 2006, left four students dead: Juan Llinás, Dreiber Melo (Law), Darwin Peñaranda (History) and Yuri Martínez (History). As usual, the authorities immediately said that the students had been manipulating explosives, which would be used in a protest during the coming days. They even came to say that these students were members of urban militias of the Front 37 of the FARC-EP [64]. However, in July 28th, 4 students who survived the explosion were found not guilty, so what happened in the end, although not entirely clear, seems to have been a slaughter planned and executed by right wing paramilitaries: only 4 days before the explosion occurred, Francisco Santos called for the militarization of university campuses because there operated subversive groups [65]. “Coincidentally”, the explosion gave strength to his “argument” [66].

Needless to say, all of these cases are in the most absolute impunity.

10. Conclusion: And after the murder... the control?

Knowing what happened in UNICOR we can be sure that what is being sought through this campaign of criminalisation and paramilitary infiltration of the universities is to move toward the control of public universities in the same manner as was done in the department of Cordoba some years ago.

How to resist this pressure that seems to come from everywhere?

- First of all, the denunciation of each aggression as much as possible, both nationally and internationally;
- To increase the levels of organisation and unity of students at a national level;
- To fortify the bonds of the Colombian student movement with the student movement of other countries that can develop actions of impact, solidarity and pressure;
- To break the isolation of the university community and to deepen the bonds that unite it with other social actors who today also offer resistance to the social project of the government;
- To keep carrying mobilisations and actions to bring the public attention to this situation;

In conclusion, we believe it is important to emphasize that what is now happening on the campuses is part of a widespread climate of terror, threats and violence in Colombia, an everyday reality that Uribe tries to hide under a thick blanket of propaganda, with fanciful rigged statistics and statements, which aims to make the world believe that Colombia is a haven of democratic freedoms and social welfare where nothing ever happens.

The propaganda doesn't come at a cheap price: it is estimated that during 2007 alone the Colombian state spent at least \$12,800,000,000 (€4,530,071.9220) on propaganda. And there is no greater surprise to see that the bulk of this expenditure was made by two of the state institutions more stained by human rights violations and links to the paramilitaries: the Ministry of Defence (42%) and Parliament (27%) [67].

But the sun cannot be covered with one finger: despite the propaganda of the regime, their paramilitary links are increasingly evident and unacceptable. And in turn, it is increasingly clear that this alliance is nothing more than a crusade to establish political and social model which is deeply hostile to the most basic rights and needs of the people of Colombia . This model can be imposed only through violence, whether overt or covert: Uribe's war is a war against all of the people and is nothing but the utmost expression of a social model based on the dispossession through the violence of state and its para-institutional tentacles which have been consolidated after decades of war. It is in the hands of the people where rests the ability to twist the arm of this history of dispossession and violence. It is time to awaken this force.

July 28, 2009
CILEP // Red Libertaria Popular Mateo Kramer
José Antonio Gutiérrez D. (Fellow of CILEP)

- [1] The government intelligence agency.
- [2] This expresión is coined by Renán Vega Cantor in his book “Los economistas neoliberales: nuevos criminales de guerra”. Bogotá: Centro Bolivariano, 2005, pp. 125-169.
- [3] “Universidad y Estatuto Estudiantil”. Comité Académico Red Revuelta. In: “Documento de trabajo No.3. Alternativas frente al estatuto estudiantil”. Bogotá: Planeta Paz, 2009, pp. 45-55.
- [4] Quoted in Ibid, p. 50.
- [5] This was the opinion held by Red Revuelta and Red Antorcha during the 2008 strike in the National University of Colombia, Bogotá. There is a document entitled “La universidad sitiada”. Check out www.redrevuelta.org
- [6] Through an article of the Nacional Development Plan, the government is aiming at forcing the nacional public universities to assume part of the cost of the debt from pensions. To put but one example, the debt of the National University of Colombia is of around \$3,000,000,000,000 (€1,063,435,088.705) what equals three years of the overall costs of itself.
- [7] Cf. <http://www.moir.org.co/Opongamonos-a-la-destruccion-de-....html>
- [8] In 2008 the budget deficit of Pamplona University was of \$42,000,000,000 (€14,891,472.711) and that of Magdalena University , of \$8,000,000,000 (€2,835,765.67986). On the other hand, the current deficit of the UPTC is of \$18,000,000,000 (€6,381,227.794505). Cf. <http://www.moir.org.co/Opongamonos-a-la-destruccion-de-....html>
- [9] Amaya Francoa, Manuel Enrique. “Universidad y Democracia alrededor de la “Reforma de Córdoba”, in: “Universidad y Sociedad”, Revista Argumento, issues 14/15, 16/17, Bogotá, 1986, p. 158.
- [10] García, Carlos Arturo. “El movimiento estudiantil en Colombia década del sesenta”, in: “Universidad y Sociedad”, Revista Argumento, issues 14/15, 16/17, Bogotá, 1986, p.189.
- [11] Cf. http://www.presidencia.gov.co/seguridad_democratica.pdf
- [12] Cf. http://redes.pradpi.org/article.php?article_id=45
- [13] Cf. <http://www.vanguardia.com/politica/93-politica/20324-an...encia>
- [14] Cf. <http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/ediciones/184-edic....html>
- [15] The U Party was created in 2005 out of a Liberal Party dissidence at whose head was the current Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos, which promoted the re-election of Álvaro Uribe in the presidential elections of 2006.
- [16] Cf. <http://blog.ginaparody.com/2008/09/la-seguridad-en-bogo...html>
- [17] <http://www.colectivodeabogados.org/FEDERACION-DE-ESTUDI...ANTES>
<http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-...egios>
- [18] <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-...egios>
- [19] Sometimes this witch hunt goes beyond accusations and some set ups have been carried (the so called “falsos positivos” or “false positives” in English), as that denounced by the students of Univalle. On April 4th 2009 both ESMAD and SIJIN (police branches) entered Univalle to conduct a raid in which they “discovered” explosives, what evidence proved to be a set up according to the students. After this the university was closed for a while. http://www.redcolombia.org/index.php?option=com_content...id=34 see also <http://www.senadoragloriainesramirez.org/index.php/2009...alle/>
- [20] <http://www.verdadabierta.com/web3/victimarios/los-jefes...rdoba>
- [21] Cf. <http://www.dhcolombia.info/spip.php?article709>
- [22] Cf. <http://www.fidh.org/Detenciones-y-amenazas-contr>
- [23] Cf. <http://www.dhcolombia.info/spip.php?article709>
- [24] To have a look at the scary profile of this Prosecutor check out: <http://www.semana.com/noticias-opinion/fiscal-camouflado...aspx>
- [25] The counter-insurgent fuzz is in sharp contrast with the permissiveness of the authorities in relation to the right wing paramilitary presence in the public universities, as was denounced in an article of Semana at the time of the Parody accusations and of the Prosecutor’s inquisitorial activities: “Few weeks ago Prosecutor Jorge Iván Piedrahita ordered to review the databases of all public universities of the Capital. This measure was a prompt response to the denunciations by Senador Gina Parody about the suspected infiltration of university campuses in Bogota by the guerrillas. The swift intervention of the prosecuting bodies to the universities in Bogota , is in sharp contrast with the sloppy action taken on the case of Unicor, which in spite of enormous evidence and of the brutal level of violence no one did anything about it, even though there were constant denunciations”. http://comunidades.semana.com/wf_InfoNoticia.aspx?IdNot...a=829
- [25] Cf. <http://www.fidh.org/Detenciones-y-amenazas-contr>
- [26] Cf. <http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/actualidad/interna...mico-colombiano-a-quien-bogota->

relaciona-con-las-farc.html

[27] Cf. <http://web.presidencia.gov.co/sp/2008/mayo/21/02212008.html>

[28] Check out article 66 of the 975 Law of 2005 (the so called Justice and Peace Law) en:

http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/justicia_paz...5.pdf

[29] http://comunidades.semana.com/wf_InfoNoticia.aspx?IdNot...a=829

[30] The murder of Iguarán took place in the very home of Hernández.

[31] <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2008/12/04/capturan-al-rect...arra/> Alter a short while he was let go, but he World not be the rector again.

[32] http://comunidades.semana.com/wf_InfoNoticia.aspx?IdNot...a=829

[33] Ver <http://www.verdadabierta.com/web3/victimarios/los-jefes...rdoba>,

<http://www.verdadabierta.com/web3/component/content/art...timas>,

http://comunidades.semana.com/wf_InfoNoticia.aspx?IdNot...a=829, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-nacion/universidad-paras...aspx>

[34] Uribe, himself a big landowner, having a large estate called El Ubérrimo, is one of the 2,300 Colombians who own over 2,000 hectares of land. All of them together own around 40 million hectares.. Cf. Cepeda, Iván; Rojas, Jorge. “A las puertas de El Ubérrimo”. Bogotá: Debate, p.36.

[35] “Mancuso has recognised his role in at least 300 murders and in the massacres of Mapiripán in which over 20 peasants were killed and El Aro where some 15 were killed in 1997. He is also pointed as the responsible for the massacre of la Gabarra in 1999, where 35 people were murdered, and of the massacre of El Salado, where over 100 people were slaughtered. This paramilitary confessed that the paramilitary structure Bloque Catatumbo, of which he was commander, was responsible over all of the death of some 5,000 civilians” Ibid, p.17.

[36] On this issue Mancuso states that: “Uribe has proved a firm discourse and a transparent management of State affairs, as governor of Antioquia and in every single public office he has held” Ibid, p.60.

[37] Ibid, p.35.

[38] The conversation can be heard at <http://www.vanguardia.com/multimedia/audios/27431-llama...stola>

[39] <http://www.colectivodeabogados.org/Plan-Pistola>

[40] This name has been assumed by one of the groups in this new phase of the paramilitary strategy that starts with the negotiations between the government of Álvaro Uribe and paramilitary structure United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia and the implementation of the 975 Law of 2005 “by which dispositions are put in place in order to reintegrate members of organised illegal armed groups, who contribute in an effective manner to achieve peace in the nation. It also puts in place other dispositions with an eye to humanitarian agreements”. These groups constantly refer to the need of implementing the Democratic Security doctrine promoted by the government of Álvaro Uribe.

[41] <http://colombia.indymedia.org/news/2009/05/101819.php>

[42] www.vanguardia.com/.../27481-caso-uis-el-equipo-de-prensa-recibio-ordenes-de-espiar-

[43] This statement can be checked at <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/12143>

[44] <http://www.colectivodeabogados.org/Hostigamientos-amena...ontra>

[45] Cf. <http://justiciapazcolombia.com/5ta-AMENAZAS-CONTRA-EST...ES-DE>

[46] This threat coincided with the arrival of the indigenous “Minga” to Bogotá, a national protest of indigenous communities, so the curfew was intended so the students would not stay in the university to support this popular protest.

[47] Cf. <http://justiciapazcolombia.com/5ta-AMENAZAS-CONTRA-EST...ES-DE>

[48] Cf. <http://www.lafuerzainformativa.com/index.php?option=com...id=56>; ver también:

<http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/articulo1...oquia>

[49] Cf. <http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/ediciones/184-edic...html>

[50] Cf. <http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/ediciones/184-edic...html>

[51] Cf. <http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/cvn/1665/fo-articulo-1132...9.pdf>

[52] <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/tema-del-dia/articu...calia>

[53] <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/judicial/articuloim...-cidh> ver también

<http://www.polodemocratico.net/Asesinato-del-estudiante...ohnny>

[54] http://www.redcolombia.org/index.php?option=com_content...id=34

[55] <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/doc/andres3.html>

[56] http://www.eltiempo.com/blogs/esto_le_pasa/2007/08/MUER...D.php

<http://www.prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article581>

[57] <http://www.senadoragloriainesramirez.org/index.php/2009...alle/>

- [58] <http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/ediciones/184-edic....html> ver también
<http://aceucauca.blogspot.com/2009/03/asesinato-del-est....html>
- [59] <http://www.elspectador.com/articulo126902-asesinan-ex-...oquia>
- [60] <http://colombia.indymedia.org/news/2006/10/50873.php>
<http://colombia.indymedia.org/news/2006/10/51234.php>
<http://espanol.groups.yahoo.com/group/coordinacionvivie...e/898>
- [61] <http://www.dhcolombia.info/spip.php?article275>
- [62] http://www.desdeabajo.info/index.php/ediciones/134-edic...angel*.html
- [63] <http://aceubq.blogspot.com/2007/10/un-ao-despus-de-la-e....html>
- [64] http://redes.pradpi.org/article.php?article_id=45
- [65] <http://fenalprou.org.co/content/view/58/1/>
- [66] <http://www.elspectador.com/opinion/columnistasdelimpre...do-16>